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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - IRAQ ELECTIONS
PARIS - TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 01, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

IRAQ ELECTIONS

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

RIGHT-OF-CENTER LES ECHOS FEATURES AN OP-ED PENNED BY AMBASSADOR LEACH ENTITLED "FRANCO-AMERICAN TRADE RELATIONS: A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS." "FRANCE AND THE U.S. ENJOY ECONOMIC RELATIONS WHICH ARE STRONG, MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL AND GROWING. AT THE CORE OF THIS ASSOCIATION THERE IS A COMMUNITY OF VALUES, SUCH AS DEMOCRACY. AND THE FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF IN FREEDOM OF TRADE AND WORLD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT."

ALTHOUGH FRONT PAGES ARE MOSTLY DEVOTED TO DOMESTIC SOCIAL ISSUES, LIKE THE DEBATE AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO REFORM THE LAW ON THE 35-HOUR WORKWEEK, MANY EDITORIALS AND OP-EDS CONTINUE TO BE DEVOTED TO THE IRAQI ELECTIONS, DEBATING ABOUT THE PROCESS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY AND THE CONCERNS WHICH A PRIMARILY SHIITE IRAQI GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO BE ELICITING IN ARAB COUNTRIES IN THE REGION. IN SEVERAL INSTANCES, - CATHOLIC LA CROIX AND LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE - THE EDITORIALS CLEARLY PRAISE PRESIDENT BUSH FOR ACHIEVING THIS FEAT. IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION AN ANALYSIS BY JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN UNDERSCORES THE CONCERNS IN THE ARAB WORLD ABOUT A "SHIITE CRESCENT" IN THE REGION. (SEE PART C)

IN A FRONT-PAGE OP-ED IN LE MONDE TITLED "`CONDI'S CATALOGUE", SENIOR EDITORIALIST ANDRE FONTAINE WRITES: "HER HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE WAS NOT JUST A FORMALITY. CONDOLEEZZA RICE NEEDED TO BE CONVINCING IN ORDER TO BE SWORN IN. BUT ALSO TO SHOW HER DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THOSE ALLIES WHOM SHE TREATED RATHER RUDELY." IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO HER VISIT TO PARIS ON FEBRUARY 8 IS NOTED.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

IRAQ ELECTIONS

"THE COURAGE OF THE IRAQIS"
LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE IN AN UNSIGNED EDITORIAL (02/01): "THE NUMBER OF IRAQIS WHO VOTED IS IN ITSELF A MAJOR VICTORY FOR WHICH PRESIDENT BUSH CONGRATULATED HIMSELF. HIS OBSTINACY IN RESISTING THOSE WHO URGED HIM TO POSTPONE THE ELECTIONS, A TRAIT OF CHARACTER WHICH IS HIS STRENGTH AND HIS WEAKNESS, HAS SERVED HIM WELL THIS TIME AND IT WOULD BE INDECENT TO REPROACH HIM FOR OFFERING THE IRAQIS THIS CHANCE AT FREE ELECTIONS. NOW THE QUESTION ARISES ABOUT THE AMBITION OF CERTAIN AYATOLLAHS TO ESTABLISH AN IRAN-STYLE THEOCRACY. SOMETHING THAT WOULD WORRY NOT ONLY THE SUNNIS, BUT ALSO IRAQ'S OTHER NEIGHBORS AND WASHINGTON. IN THE MEANTIME PRESIDENT BUSH HAS REGISTERED A SUCCESS THAT WILL ALLOW HIM TO PREPARE AN EXIT STRATEGY FROM A CONFLICT WHICH IS INCREASINGLY UNPOPULAR IN THE U.S."

"BUSH. AGAIN RE-ELECTED"
BRUNO FRAPPAT IN CATHOLIC LA CROIX (02/01): "BETWEEN THE BALLOTS AND THE BOMBS, THE BALLOTS WON. AND BEHIND THE IRAQI VOTING CENTERS, THE MAN WHO DID EVERYTHING TO GET THEM GOING: PRESIDENT BUSH. WHEN HE VISITS EUROPE LATER THIS MONTH HE WILL BE ABLE TO PRESENT HIMSELF AS RE-ELECTED ONCE AGAIN. BUT THIS ELECTION CANNOT BE A WAY TO LEGITIMIZE THE WAR AFTER THE FACT. STILL, AT THIS POINT IN THE HISTORY OF IRAQ, THE STRATEGY OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION HAS SCORED POINTS AND THE MOST RETICENT AMONG THE ALLIES MUST SALUTE THIS. THE WORSE CASE SCENARIO HAS BEEN AVOIDED; THERE IS CHAOS BUT IT DOES NOT REIGN SUPREME."

"THREE SIDES OF THE TRIANGLE"
GERARD DUPUY IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (02/01): "BY TURNING OUT IN SUCH GREAT NUMBERS, THE IRAQIS HAVE PROVEN THAT THEY TAKE DEMOCRACY MUCH MORE SERIOUSLY THAN MANY ARAB SPECIALISTS. BUT DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ IS BOTH A NEW AND EXPLOSIVE ISSUE. BY DEFINITION THE NEW MAJORITY EXCLUDES THE SUNNI MINORITY. WILL IRAQ SURVIVE THIS? BY VOTING ON SUNDAY THE IRAQIS VOTED LESS FOR DEMOCRACY THAN FOR RECOGNITION OF THE SHIITE ELEMENT. THE FIRST TASK OF THE IRAQI CONSTITUTION WILL BE TO FIND A MODUS VIVENDI FOR THE THREE SIDES OF THE TRIANGLE."

"EUROPE STOPS SHORT OF CONGRATULATING THE U.S."
ALEXANDRINE BOUILHET IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (02/01):
"SURPRISED BY THE SUCCESS OF THE ELECTIONS IN IRAQ, THE
EUROPEANS ARE CONGRATULATING EVERYONE, INCLUDING THEMSELVES,
BUT WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTION OF THE U.S. . IN THEIR
COMMUNIQUE, THE FIVE PARAGRAPHS DEVOTED TO IRAQ MENTIONS
NEITHER THE AMERICANS NOR THE BRITISH. AS A DIPLOMAT ON THE
SIDE OF PEACE SAID, 'THEY HAVE CONGRATULATED THEMSELVES ENOUGH
AS IT IS.' MORE DIPLOMATICALLY, FRENCH FM BARNIER REMINDS ALL
THAT THE U.S. IS 'PART OF THE UN AND THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY.' MORE CONCRETELY, THE EUROPEANS ARE STILL RELUCTANT
TO GET INVOLVED IN IRAQ. FOR BARNIER, 'THE IRAQI TRAGEDY WILL
NOT BE RESOLVED WITH MORE SOLDIERS.' STILL THE EUROPEANS MUST
MAKE A 'CONSTRUCTIVE' GESTURE BEFORE PRESIDENT BUSH'S VISIT TO
BRUSSELS FEBRUARY 22 AND SECRETARY OF STATE CONDOLEEZZA RICE'S
VISIT TO PARIS ON FEBRUARY 8. THIS IS WHY THE EU WILL BE
OFFERING TO TRAIN IRAQI POLICE AND CIVIL SERVANTS, 'BUT
OUTSIDE IRAQ' SAYS PARIS AND BERLIN."

"FROM CAIRO TO RIYADH, WORRY AND CONTEMPT"
JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (02/01):
"BEFORE THE ELECTIONS ARAB STATES VOICED NUMEROUS OPINIONS.
AFTER THE VOTES ARE IN, THEY ARE REMAINING NOTICEABLY QUIET.
FROM CAIRO TO RIYADH AND DAMASCUS, ALL ARAB LEADERS DO NOT
SHARE THE SAME OPINION BUT THEY ARE ALL SURPRISED BY THE LARGE
TURNOUT, WHICH THEY HAD UNDERESTIMATED. THEY ARE NOT VERY
TALKATIVE ABOUT TWO ISSUES WHICH ARE OF CONCERN TO THEM AND
SEEM TO BE OBSESSING THEM: IRAQ'S NEW MULTI-PARTY POLITICS AND
THE QUESTION OF REFORMS IN THE ARAB WORLD. CONCERNS ABOUT A
'SHIITE CRESCENT' IN IRAQ AND THE SAUDI PENINSULA ARE
EMERGING. UNABLE TO EXPRESS THEIR CONCERNS OPENLY, ARAB
LEADERS ARE DOING IT THROUGH THEIR PRESS. SOME SEE THESE
ELECTIONS AS A VICTORY THAT WILL LEAD IRAQ TO LOSE ITS
'ARABNESS.' OTHERS HAVE ADDED THAT THE U.S. WILL USE THE
ELECTIONS TO LEGITIMIZE ITS OCCUPATION OF IRAQ. MEANWHILE
WESTERN EXPERTS ARE MORE TEMPERED. THEY ARE NOT CONVINCED THAT
IRAQ'S SHIITES ARE COMPLETELY TIED TO TEHERAN." LEACH